

FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union ♦♦♦ www.fbu.org.uk

March 2012



Undermining your pension

Why the government's proposals are unrealistic and unacceptable See p10





Matt Wrack

New phase in pensions campaign



By the time you read this magazine, the Fire Brigades Union will be facing a crucial moment in our campaign to defend firefighters' pensions. This month the union's executive council will decide how the FBU should respond to the government's proposals. Your views on these issues are absolutely critical

– ultimately it is our members who decide what the union does in the face of these attacks.

Work at the FBU's head office in the first part of this year so far has been dominated by discussions around pensions. On 9 February, after many promises and a further two-week delay, the government finally published its proposals for firefighters' pensions.

They have called their proposals a "heads of agreement" but it is nothing of the sort, because the FBU has not signed any agreement on pensions. Although the document states that the proposals are "final", there are so many flaws and inconsistencies that the government cannot simply dig its heels in and pretend that no more can be discussed. We are ready and willing to talk.

Working to 60 is unsustainable

The FBU has used two very clear arguments about the government's pension proposals that have not so far been met with a

satisfactory response. First, the government has assumed it can get operational firefighters to work until we are 60. However it has failed to provide a shred of evidence to back up this proposal. The "heads of agreement" includes a limited commitment to review what is technically called the "normal pension age" of 60.

The union has argued that designing a pension scheme with an unrealistic and unsustainable normal pension age of 60 is to build in a structural flaw from the start. It would be like designing a building without looking at the land it is built upon. Since all the calculations we have seen so far are based on retiring at 60, the government has simply come up with an unworkable scheme.

We have told the government that if it is serious about our pensions, it should start with a normal pension age which firefighters, who actually do the work, believe is workable. We believe that should be 55, as it is in the (old) Firefighters' Pension Scheme. This would actually mean a reduction in pension age for members of the new (post 2006) scheme – but we have argued that this would allow a scheme which takes account of the work our members do. If the government does not take account of the demands of the occupation, the pension scheme will be built to fail. Increasing numbers of firefighters will face capability and ill-health proceedings at the end of career which, apart from

the strain on individuals, will wreck the pension scheme.

Contributions

The second substantial argument we have put to the government is that increasing firefighters' pension contributions is not only unfair to firefighters but will also make the pension scheme unworkable. It is unfair to us because most of our members already pay the highest contributions in the public sector (11%) and because firefighters have faced a particularly severe freeze in our pay in recent years.

But we have also taken on the government's financial arguments. The union believes that some firefighters will opt out of their pension scheme when faced with increases of 3.2%. Our survey last year showed that 12% were very likely to opt out. We know employers have concerns about this too – yet the government assumes firefighters will just keep on paying.

A mass opt-out would simply wreck the pension scheme, as contributions today are used to fund payments of retired firefighters tomorrow. If the flow stops, the schemes will not work.

Our officials want to hear your views and we need to hear those views if we are to move forward together in unity

Other concerns

Since the proposal came out on 9 February, we have held further discussions and submitted our formal response. We have also highlighted other issues of concern, such as accrual rates, revaluation rates and commutation factors, but we feel that the logical position is to pursue a workable normal pension age as a priority. Other issues are largely dependent on a scheme being affordable and having a workable and realistic normal pension age.

However, we have challenged the government specifically on the inconsistent way that the 10-year protection is being applied; the lack of progress on the eligibility for fire control members joining a fire service pension scheme; and the lack of reassurance around the implementation of the retained modified scheme. Control firefighters should know that the FBU has rejected the deal offered to LGPS members, because it assumes you can work until 68.

Our union has been holding committee meetings at regional and brigade level on the pension proposals. Our officials want to hear your views and we need to hear those views if we are to move forward together in unity. We do not know exactly how events will unfold since discussions are continuing and the situation is likely to change at various stages, but the pension campaign has now entered a new phase and every firefighter is affected. I am confident we will stand together to meet this attack.

Contents

Retirement age plans cannot work

If you can't beat them ... Lord Prescott tries a police bike for size – Station Cat, p23



LETTERS

Picture of M5 incident

As a crew manager who attended the M5 incident in November last year I am totally dismayed that you have presented, in *Firefighter* magazine, an article about the incident using a stock picture that is over twenty years out of date. This is just appalling, let alone amateurish. I expect an apology in your next magazine and suggest the editor pays more attention to detail.

Giles White

Firefighter: The last issue of *Firefighter* magazine did carry an article on the M5 fire with a photograph to illustrate it. A photo agency had supplied us with a large number of images of the M5 accident and fire but also included some images that were of a major accident several years before. All images supplied prominently marked them as having been taken on the same day – 5 November 2011, the day of the M5 incident.

The result was that *Firefighter* magazine used an image in good faith which was not of the aftermath of the M5 fire. It should have been picked up, but it wasn't for which we apologise.

News

- 4** Attack on maternity rights
- 5** Pensions appeal
Officers' lobby
- 6** Cuts warnings
Council tax freezes
- 7 News focus**
Climate change risks assessment

Features

- 10 Pensions proposals**
Unaffordable, unrealistic and unacceptable
- 14 Work 'til you drop**
Control members' pensions
- 16 Aerobic tests**
FBU exposes new weakness in 'Retire at 60' plan

Regulars

- 5 Sounding off**
Automatic fire alarms
- 8 Aerial ladder platform**
Government plans injury compensation cut
- 18 Health**
Workers' Memorial Day
- 19 Legal Beagle**
What rights does my grumpy neighbour have?
- 20 Day off**
Brazilian jiu jitsu in Surrey
- 22 Puzzles**
Win an olive tree
- 23 Station Cat**
The news they don't want you to hear
- 24 25-year badges**

20



Meet Brazilian jiu jitsu contender Ashley Martineaux

FBU warns of attack on maternity leave rights

Women's rights

The government is planning an attack on women's rights by proposing a reduction in maternity leave from at least 26 weeks at present to 18 weeks. The proposals would increase the risk that some women would be pressured either to start maternity

leave too close to the birth or return to work earlier than they should, said FBU executive council member Denise Christie.

"That pressure could come from either the employer or a partner if 18 weeks is seen as the 'norm' for maternity," she said. "This would be felt particularly if there was a lack of job security or the family had financial worries."

"The FBU is responding to these proposals along with the TUC. We are strongly objecting to this reduction."

The FBU's warning comes in the run-up to 8 March, International Women's Day, which has been observed since the early 1900s. "You could think that women have gained true equality but women are still not paid equally to men," said Denise Christie.

"Women are still not present in equal numbers in business or politics, women still face discrimination and violence against them is far worse than that faced by men."

"The fire service is no different when it comes to potential discrimination during pregnancy. Increasing numbers of women are being removed or threatened with removal from their shift during pregnancy," she said. "The FBU has seen an increase in the number of grievances our women members are taking out against their FRS when they become pregnant."

"The Grey Book is clear: 'Pregnant

employees will normally remain on their watch, or in their department, unless this is deemed inappropriate following an individual risk assessment.' We have found that services rarely carry out an individual risk assessment, but still try to remove members from their shift or department. I would urge any members who have been told that they need to move from their current shift whilst pregnant to contact their FBU rep and seek advice."

Denise Christie said International Women's Day should not be "a reminder about the negatives, but a celebration of the positives". Thousands of events were held throughout the world to inspire women and celebrate their achievements.

The FBU's National Women's School takes place 30 March – 1 April at Wortley Hall, near Sheffield.

Details at www.nwcfbu.co.uk



Denise Christie:
strong objection



Two Spanish firefighters unfurl a banner with the message "firefighters - burnt" during a demonstration in Madrid organised by unions against public sector cuts

Les Skarratts: It's not false alarms that burn down buildings. It's the ones which are not.

www.fbu.org.uk

Unions back in court for pensions appeal

Pension uprating

The FBU was one of seven unions that challenged the government in the court of appeal in February over changes to the way pensions will be increased. The move would cut the value of pensions by 15% over time.

Last year the high court ruled in a judicial review sought by unions that the government plan to switch from the Retail Price Index (RPI) to the usually lower Consumer Price Index (CPI) for increasing pensions was lawful.

The FBU maintains this is a deficit reduction measure and, therefore, unlawful under social security legislation. That legislation, the union argues, does not allow for national economic considerations to

be used when deciding which is the best practical estimate of the increase in prices.

While all three high court judges agreed in their original ruling that deficit reduction was the motivation for the switch, two of them said the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions was within his rights to take into account public finances.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "Public sector employees are being forced to bear the burden of the financial crisis brought on by the actions of the banks. The Chancellor was motivated by deficit reduction measures sparked by that crisis when he made the switch.

"We will not allow this unfair and, in our view, unlawful breach of the contracts of millions of workers to rest."



SOUNDING OFF

Ministry of Daft Ideas

Merseyside brigade secretary Les Skarratts warns of the dangers of delay in responding to automatic fire alarms

You might recall a young John Cleese in an old Monty Python sketch about the Ministry of Funny Walks. The fire service has its own version – the Ministry of Daft Ideas.

The latest one is not to send any response at all to an automatic fire alarm until a fire has been confirmed. This is one from Merseyside.

Most AFAs are false alarms. As we all know, firefighters never go to a false alarm, we only ever come back from them. It's not false alarms that burn down buildings. It's the ones which aren't which do the damage.

In Merseyside it would mean no immediate response to around 290 actual fires a year – where an alarm is activated – that the service knows it will only respond to when a fire is confirmed.

One suggestion is to send someone in to take a look in a building where a fire alarm has been activated. There are obvious dangers. We are equipped and trained to go in and check. We have specialist equipment to spot hard-to-detect fires, a quick visual check by a non-firefighter without our experience and training is fraught with problems and is a disaster waiting to happen.

By the time we get there, the fire could be well established. And that means more danger for us when we do go in.

Graham Ellicott, chief executive of the Fire Industry Association, has described these proposals as flying in the face of CLG research. It is "ill-conceived", "ill-considered", "confrontational" and "provocative in the extreme".

He gave this warning to Merseyside fire authority: "Sooner or later their refusal to attend will mean that a fire will occur that will cause extreme property damage which will lead to jobs being lost or, in the worst case, somebody will be badly injured or die."



FBU members rally outside the high court in London

Officers brief MPs on contributions hike

Officers lobby

Officer members lobbied MPs in January over reforms that will see their pension contributions rise from 11% of salary to as much as 16% by 2014. Officers face extra payments of between £2,700 and £7,200 over the next three years alone.

From 2015 watch managers will pay an extra £1,200 every year; station managers an extra £1,900 every year; group managers an extra £2,500 every year; and area managers over £3,000 extra every year.

Martin Pottinger, FBU officers' national committee secretary, said: "Everyone in the fire service faces being hit, but the higher up the chain of command the harder you

are being hit. Like firefighters, officers are at the heart of our emergency response to all incidents. Officers are also being hit hard by cuts and taking on much more work to fill the gaps caused by the dangerous reduction in staff and standards."

Gary Platts, East Midlands officer rep, said the MPs they spoke to understood that officers were being unfairly targeted or even punished for being promoted. "One MP said: 'It seems blatantly excessive and unreasonable.'

"All MPs who attended were given FBU material to bring them up to speed. Some agreed to table questions asking why the FBU's independent research on the pensions issue had received no answers whatsoever."

Authority warned over effect of cuts

Fife

Fife fire and rescue service has been warned over the impact of budget cuts by the Accounts Commission, Scotland's equivalent of the Audit Commission.

The spending watchdog said the service had already made significant cuts but is facing further reductions.

Fife is already finding it difficult to maintain standard crewing levels on its fire engines, the commission warned. It said:

"It is difficult to see how further savings can be achieved without the potential for some increase in community risks."

Fife FBU brigade secretary Scott McCabe said: "This independent report mirrors the concerns that the FBU has raised over the last two years during our campaign.

"We would now ask Fife council elected members, based on this report: 'Have you got the balance between budgets and community safety right?'"

Tax freeze gambles with lives, FBU warns

Council tax

The FBU has warned fire authorities of the dangers to the public and firefighters of freezing council tax income.

Fire authorities that freeze or reduce their council tax precept receive additional funding under a Treasury scheme.

Dorset FBU has hit out at its fire authority for ditching plans to raise 4.2p a week in council tax for the local fire service. The fire authority voted down the plans by seven to five, making cuts to frontline services inevitable.

Raising council tax by £2.16 a year – 4.2p a week for band D households – was backed by the budget group, the community risk group, the chief officer and the chair of the fire authority. But councillors backed a freeze for the fire service for the second year in a row.

FBU Dorset brigade secretary Karen Adams said: "We're angry that these seven councillors went against all the professional advice they were being given. It beggars belief that they think the public would trade 4.2p a week for every household for cuts which will increase risk to life across the county.

"Keeping a first-class fire service for the people of Dorset was in the gift of the fire authority. Instead they have decided that the price of a life is not worth 4.2 pence a week."

Berkshire FBU has strongly condemned Royal Berkshire fire authority's decision to freeze council tax for a second year. The authority accepted the government's council tax freeze grant instead of opting for a modest increase of just 3.5% to its share of the council tax. That rise would have equated to just £1.95 a year for a band D household and given the authority a stable financial footing for the future.

Berkshire FBU said the move raised the potential for further cuts. Berkshire FBU brigade chair Maurice Whyte said the authority had missed the opportunity to put vital funds into its base budget. "The people of Berkshire now face potential cutbacks and may not get the service that they deserve in future years.

"Put simply, the fire authority has baulked at making the right decision at the right time and this is something we shall pay for later in terms of an efficient and effective fire service."



Branch reps course a success. Amelia Diallo, Lincolnshire FBU assistant brigade secretary, said: "It was a significant success, equipping us with the skills needed to operate effectively and professionally. I would highly recommend this type of course to existing reps – so speak to your education and learning rep about how it could help in your brigade."

Union warns of closure risks

Highlands and Islands

Highlands and Islands FBU is urging its fire board not to allow firemaster Trevor Johnson to "suspend" operations at some stations. Mr Johnson wants to close the stations, blaming inadequate training and lack of resources.

Calum MacNeill, FBU Highlands and Islands brigade chair, warned that the Highlands and Islands contain significant risks.

"There are varying risks across the Highlands from hotels, to nuclear sites, and MoD fuel storage depots," he said. "Risks are the only criteria that should be considered when reviewing a



Dounreay nuclear research establishment in Caithness: The Highlands are home to a variety of significant risks

fire station and not whether a station costs too much in relation to the number of times it's called out.

"If the senior managers are intent on closing stations then the stations

under review should be identified as soon as possible. That will allow the FBU, local firefighters and their communities to fight any proposed closure or suspension."



Order more sandbags: The number of people exposed to significant likelihood of flooding will increase from 900,000 today to between 1.3m and 3.6m by the 2050s and perhaps 5 million by the 2080s.

Climate risks highlighted

The risk of floods, wildfire, storms and drought flagged up in the government's new climate change risk assessment will require substantial investment in the fire and rescue service, the FBU says

Defra published its *Climate Change Risk Assessment* report in January, setting out the likely impact of climate change on the UK over the coming decades. The latest projections show increases in summer and winter temperatures, increases in winter rainfall, decreases in summer rainfall, more days of heavy rainfall and rising sea levels.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "This report shows why a well resourced and fully staffed fire and rescue service is needed now and in the future. The risks from extreme weather and the need to effect rescues during floods, storms, wildfires and droughts all need trained and

professional firefighters.

"The government must ensure that our fire and rescue service is properly funded to ensure that there are sufficient firefighters to meet these challenges."

The UK is already vulnerable to extreme weather, including flooding, storms, drought and heatwaves – all with substantial implications for the way firefighters work.

The key findings in the report were:

- **People** exposed to significant likelihood of flooding will increase from 900,000 today to between 1.3m and 3.6m by the 2050s and perhaps 5 million by the 2080s.
- Increase in **deaths** each year due to flooding and storms could increase from between 4 and 17 by the 2020s and 13 and 69 by the 2080s.
- Increase in **injuries** each year due to

Flooding, storms, drought and heatwaves – all have substantial implications for the way firefighters work

flooding and storms: could increase from between 80 and 340 by the 2020s and between 270 and 1,380 by the 2080s. The current average is 360 injuries each year.

● **Homes** exposed to significant likelihood of flooding to increase from 70,000 to as much as 560,000 by the 2080s.

● Increased risk of **wildfires** in national parks will increase between 30% and 50% by the 2080s.

● Decrease in **water** available for public water supply: between 0% and 30% by the 2050s and between 4% and 35% by the 2080s.

Wrack said: "Firefighters know from the floods in 2007 and the heatwave in 2003 just how extreme weather affects our service. Firefighters can see the increased risk to the public. We want the staff, equipment and the resources to tackle the challenges professionally. Firefighters are a vital part of any strategy to adapt to climate change – which is why cuts to our service are so shortsighted."

More information:
Defra, *Climate Change Risk Assessment* report, 25 January 2012
<http://tinyurl.com/7qxguy4>

Government is planning to cut compensation for injury at work

PAUL WOOLSTENHOLMES, national officer

The types of injury that FBU members who are injured at work as a result of a criminal act can claim compensation for will be restricted by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme.

The Ministry of Justice consultation *Getting it right for victims and witnesses*, which justice secretary Kenneth Clarke claims is intended to give victims of crime more support, is actually going to ensure less support.

Some types of injuries are to be removed altogether and no compensation will be paid in future. Others would attract much lower levels of compensation.

Injuries in bands 1 to 5, which currently carry the tariff of £1,000 to £2,000, would no longer qualify for compensation. These include temporary anxiety, temporary partial deafness, some types of fractures to the hands and feet and injuries to teeth.

Injuries in bands 6 to 12 which attract between £2,500 to just below £11,000 will be reduced in value.

So eye injuries, scarring to the limbs

and torso and other injuries will be reduced from £2,500 to £1,000. Moderate burns and moderate injuries resulting in continuing significant disability such as a fractured collarbone will be reduced from £4,400 to £2,400.

Further restrictions to eligibility include, for instance, no award if the incident is not reported to the police "as soon as is reasonably practicable", if the victim has an unspent conviction and if they have lived in the UK for less than six months.

Excluding anyone with an unspent criminal conviction could mean that someone who is very seriously assaulted would not be able to claim if they had an unspent conviction for a minor offence at the time of the assault.

FBU members are often exposed to danger and injured as a result of criminal acts, including arson, vandalism and direct attacks on fire crews. Thankfully the injuries they suffer are rarely long-term. But, nevertheless, they have become the victim of crime and, as such, must be

supported and compensated.

The proposals are being dressed up as supporting victims of crime. In fact, they are a kick in the teeth for victims of crime, including those injured in the course of their work.

A whole number of injuries are now not considered serious enough to deserve any compensation at all. Others, including some burn injuries, are no longer considered as serious as before.

Far from giving more support to victims of crime, this is another cynical move by this government to deny access to justice to vulnerable and hard-working people.

Along with this government's views on health and safety legislation, this is yet another attack on basic rights. Combined with the proposals on personal injury claims in the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Bill and proposals to make employment tribunals self-financing, it shows that the government is targeting those who can least afford to pay for those services by restricting access to the legal system through cost.



VIEW
FROM THE
AERIAL LADDER
PLATFORM

Mon-Fri
Midnight-7am
9pm-Midnight

Sat
Midnight-7am
1pm-Midnight

Sun
At any time

Except
permit holders

 **RED
ROUTE**
No stopping
at any time



PICTURE:
IAN MARLOW/
ALAMY

Government plans to force firefighters to retire at 60 make its entire pensions reform scheme unworkable says the FBU

Pensions proposals: unaffordable, unrealistic and unacceptable

The long-awaited government pension proposals for firefighters were finally published on 9 February and were deemed “unacceptable” by the FBU’s executive council after careful consideration. The so-called “heads of agreement” – which has not been agreed or signed by the union – expects firefighters to pay higher pension contributions, work longer and still get a worse pension.

The union has made clear it is prepared to continue talks with government. The FBU has not “walked away” from any meetings. We have fully engaged with the government at Westminster and in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Their position is that, like the Westminster government, they have not accepted the union’s arguments on retirement age, the switch to uprating pensions back to using the Retail Price Index rather than the Consumer Price Index, or on widening access to the Firefighters’ Pension Scheme (FPS) and the New Firefighters’ Pension Scheme (NFPS) to all members covered by the

Grey Book. Nor will they agree that these are to be the only changes to pension schemes in the fire service.

The proposals do not properly address the issues raised by the FBU in our trade dispute letter (available on the union’s website www.fbu.org.uk).

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: “A normal pension age of 60 for firefighters is unrealistic and that is obvious to all of us. Everyone in the fire service is saying that 60-year-olds can’t work as frontline fire crews.

“These proposals include unfair and unaffordable contribution hikes. There is a real danger these huge hikes will trigger an exodus from the scheme. The entire scheme could rapidly become unstable.”

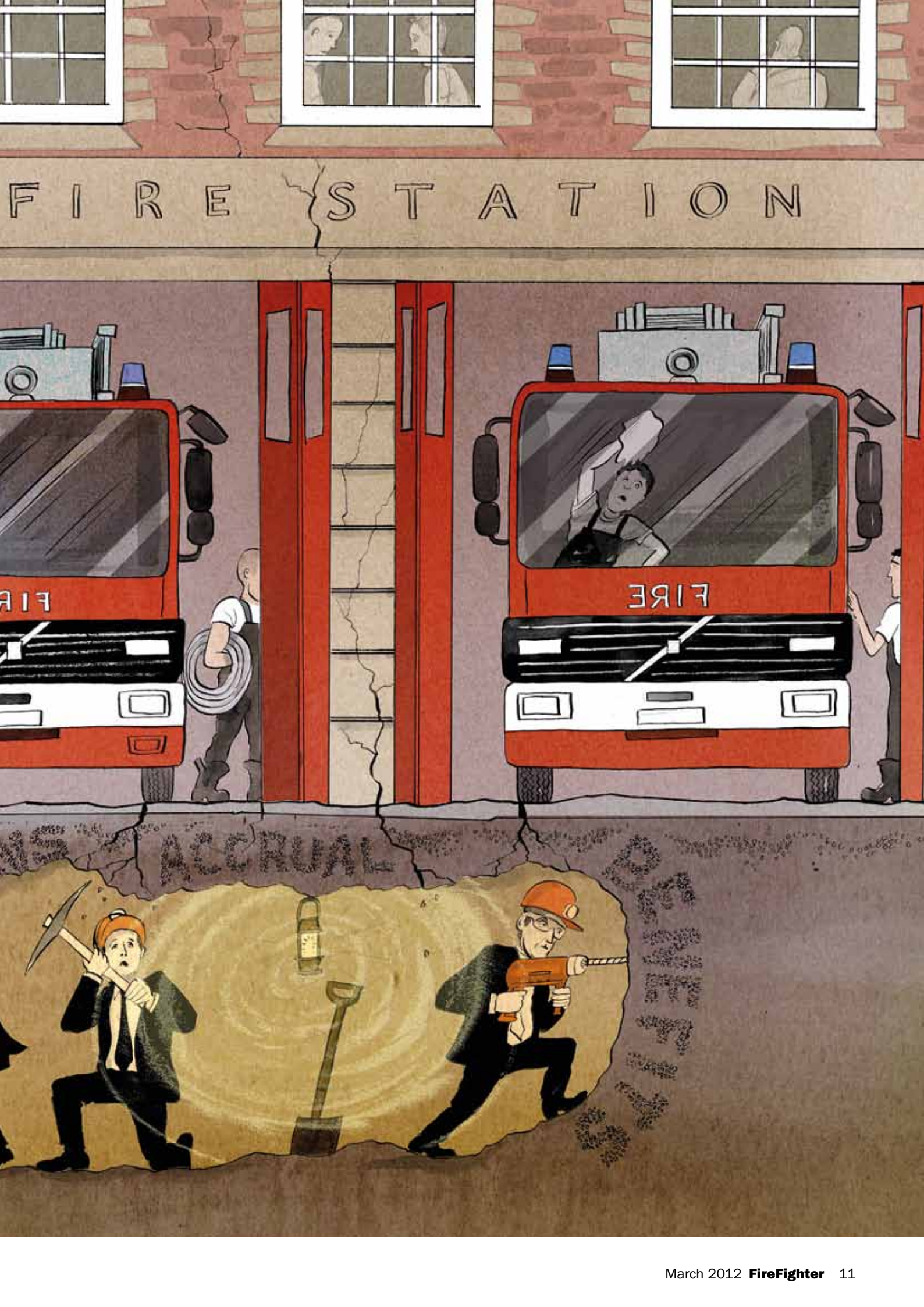
The union’s executive council agreed to consult members over the proposals and to move rapidly to prepare a strike ballot. Further meetings of the executive council are planned to consider the outcome of the consultation.

Wrack said: “We never rush into a

continued p12



PHIL DISLEY



from p10

ballot for national strike action and have constructively engaged in all talks. We need government to address the evidence we have presented, which supports our concerns.”

Unaffordable contribution rates

Firefighters already pay the highest pension contributions in the public sector and twice what is paid in the private sector. Yet the government still plans increased contributions from April 2012. If it sticks to the proposals made on 9 September 2011, then every firefighter would pay more from April.



FPS – wholetime	New rate (%)	Extra contributions (£)
Firefighter	12.3	367
Crew manager	12.3	406
Watch manager	12.4	489
Station manager	12.6	770
Group manager	12.8	1,003
Area manager	13.0	1,294

NFPS	New rate (%)	Extra contributions (£)
Retained (£10,000 pensionable pay)	9.1	132
Wholetime firefighter	9.1	169
Wholetime crew manager	9.3	250
Wholetime watch manager	9.3	280

There is worse to follow. The government has not even decided exactly how much extra it expects firefighters to pay for the following two years, but it has said that pension contributions could go up by 3.2%, with almost twice that for some officers. This would mean wholetime firefighters paying nearly £1,000 a year extra towards their pensions, retained firefighters paying nearly £500 extra a year and officers £2,000 or more extra a year.

From 2015, the government wants a new firefighters' pension scheme. The "heads of agreement" proposals set average member contributions at 13.2% from 2015. This means every firefighter will pay more than they do now in pension contributions. Members of the NFPS face a huge hike – from 8.5% now – up by a whopping 4.7%. That's £1,325 extra a year, every year for the rest of a wholetime firefighter's career. It is £470 extra a year, every year for the rest of a retained firefighter's career.

Unrealistic retirement age

These contribution increases are bad enough. But the government has also stated in the "heads of agreement" that the normal pension age (NPA) for firefighters should be 60. The FBU argues that an NPA of 60 for firefighters is

unworkable. Everyone in the fire and rescue service agrees that 60-year-olds cannot work as frontline firefighters. Most firefighters will struggle to maintain operational fitness at that age.

The government has not produced any evidence to support its plan for firefighters to retire at 60. Firefighters know it is unsustainable and the FBU's evidence has underlined that.

The current NPA is 55. The government's position states that there is protection for firefighters within 10 years of retirement from April this year, so they can still go at 55, as long as they retire by 31 March 2022. But this "protection" would mean members with 10 years or less until retirement will have to pay more for the "privilege" of retiring when they planned to.

The government has indicated that "protected" members will pay higher contributions, reaching 14.2% of salary from 2015 until retirement. This is at least £8,000 extra for those with 10 years left (£900 a year). Watch managers would pay an extra £1,200 a year; station managers an extra £1,900; group managers an extra £2,500 a year; and area managers £3,300 a year more. Retained members in the NFPS may end up paying between £1,400 and £3,600 more over ten years.

There are references in the government's document to retirement before 60. This is a smokescreen. The government is trying to create the impression that people will be able to retire with a slightly reduced pension from 57. The FBU's actuaries calculate that a firefighter who retires at age 57 would lose around 15% of their pension, or around £3,000. A firefighter retiring at 56 would lose around 60% – or £10,000.

The government has conceded that it will review the NPA of 60. It has agreed to consult with unions, employers and others about issues such as "the occupational demands of, and fitness standards for, firefighting roles". This is a concession because of the FBU's evidence. But the FBU wants the government to commit to a review now that would include revising the whole scheme if an NPA of 60 is shown to be unsustainable.

Unsustainable scheme

The FBU believes that the combined impact of an NPA of 60 and increased contributions will wreck the post-2015 firefighters' pension scheme the government is seeking to design.

The combined impact of an NPA of 60 and increased contributions will wreck the post-2015 firefighters' pension scheme the government is seeking to design

The government proposals are for a new scheme for the fire service from 2015. It has set a cost ceiling and says that the new scheme must be designed within these tight financial limits. The new scheme, as set out in the "heads of agreement", cannot work because all the costings assume an NPA of 60. All the calculations based on that simply will not work.

The FBU did not agree with retirement at 60 when it was introduced with the New Firefighters' Pension Scheme in 2006. The union consistently opposed that move and called for a reduction to 55. At the time the government promised more fire safety and other non-operational roles for older firefighters who might have been struggling with the rigours of frontline firefighting. These simply have not materialised as the service has been cut, with more cuts to come.

The most substantial government research – the Haisman report – found that the existing arrangements for the Firefighters' Pension Scheme (of retirement at 55 or earlier) were appropriate, given the demands of the job and reasonable expectations of firefighters' health and fitness. The FBU commissioned further reports last year by occupational health experts, which found no evidence that firefighters can work safely until 60. Neither the Hutton report on pensions nor the government itself have produced a shred of proof that working until 60 is feasible for most firefighters.

Because the assumed pension age is wrong, the whole debate around designing a new scheme is flawed. While the FBU has tried to work with government officials on the figures and details, these discussions have not so far been able to produce proposals for a scheme which would be fair or which could work.

Fire service employers have admitted the likelihood that under the proposed scheme large numbers of firefighters could face dismissal under capability procedures as their fitness levels declined with age. This is completely unacceptable. The FBU cannot sign up to a pensions scheme which everyone knows cannot deliver for firefighters or for the public – a scheme that simply cannot work.

The government needs to rethink and base the costings around the age firefighters can feasibly work to. It should first establish the right NPA and then design a fair scheme around it.

The government's plans to increase



STEFANO CAGNONI

'The FBU never rushes into a ballot for national strike action and will constructively engage in all talks'

contributions will wreck the new scheme financially. They will not deliver the financial savings it hopes. There is a real danger these huge hikes will trigger an exodus from the scheme as members opt out. The entire scheme could rapidly become unstable as firefighters struggle to afford the increases being demanded.

The government's proposals to raise contributions are ill-thought out. The government claims that 1% of members will drop out of the schemes as a result. The FBU has clearly demonstrated that this is utter nonsense. A YouGov survey commissioned by the FBU shows that up to 12% are very likely to opt out. If only 7% opt out the government will not make the savings it expects. It has got its sums wrong. If it proceeds, there is a real risk it will wreck pensions in the fire service.

As a result of the pressure from the FBU and other TUC unions, the Westminster government has now agreed to commission a review of the numbers who might leave each public sector scheme. But, instead of waiting for the outcome, it intends to press ahead with the contribution rises and then look at what mess results. The FBU has warned this is more like a post-mortem than a review.

Finally, the government says it will guarantee no more pension changes for 25 years. But a government today cannot "guarantee" that future governments will not worsen pension provision. The last government promised that the 2006 changes would last for decades. Yet five years on, the coalition government decided to launch a fresh attack on pensions.

What next?

Matt Wrack said: "The FBU never rushes into a ballot for national strike action and will constructively engage in all talks. The union remains committed to maintaining dialogue and there is still time for government to address the evidence we have presented to them and to salvage the situation.

"The union wants members to discuss these proposals and prepare for action if it is necessary."

MORE INFORMATION

The main text of the "heads of agreement" is on the FBU's website and in our *Pensions Bulletin* No.6.

The full text and annexes are available on the CLG website <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/fire/pdf/2086582.pdf>

Firefighter explains why the FBU is opposed to the government's proposals for control members' pensions

Work 'til you drop



Last year the government made proposals to change the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) for England and Wales which affect fire control members. Northern Ireland is expected to follow these changes, while there are currently no proposals to change the LGPS in Scotland.

The FBU carefully considered the government's proposals and decided that it could not accept them. The union believes that plans to make control firefighters work until 68 are unfair and unworkable.

The deal

Originally the government wanted to increase employee contributions from April 2012 and then make wider pension changes based around the Hutton report from 2015 (see *Firefighter*, October 2011).

After discussions between the government, employers and the lead unions, GMB, Unison and Unite, a "heads of agreement" deal was announced on 21 December. The government stated it would introduce the changes in one go from April 2014.

The consultation on the contribution increases and changes to accrual rates was suspended to allow this proposal to be considered.

The government still expects to make £900m savings by 2014-15 from the LGPS, which it believes will be achieved by the earlier introduction of scheme design changes.

The deal is only proposed for the LGPS because it is a funded scheme. The government has not applied it to unfunded schemes such as the Firefighters' Pension Scheme (FPS) and New Firefighters' Pension Scheme (NFPS).

Retirement age

The key point in the agreement (principle 5) states: "Benefits are to be adjusted up or down relative to the proximity of the pension age to the normal pension age (NPA) which is to be linked to state pension age (SPA) or age 65 whichever is later."

The government's plan means most control members would still have to work longer before getting their pension. It wants the normal pension age in the LGPS to rise with the state pension age.

The NPA is already 65 in the LGPS. The state pension age for both men and women will be 66 from October 2020. This means everyone born after 1953 will have to wait for their pension until they are 66.

In his autumn statement last year, the Chancellor announced that the state pension age will increase to 67 between 2026 and 2028. If this becomes law, anyone born after March 1961 will have to work until they are 67.

Under current legislation, the state pension age will increase to 68 between 2044 and 2046 – although this could be brought forward. At present anyone born since 1978 will be affected.

Current age	Retirement age
57 or younger	66
50 or younger	67
33 or younger	68

Increasing the normal pension age to 66 will affect almost all current control staff (96%), while the increase to 67 will affect nearly half (48%). Retirement at 68 would affect 19% of existing control staff and an increasing number who join from now on.



CLIVE GOODARD

Increased contributions

The government originally announced last year that members of the LGPS would pay increased contributions of 1.5% by 2014-15, phased in from April 2012. However in the agreement, it put off any contribution increases until April 2014.

The agreement does include a cap on employer (namely government/taxpayers') contributions – so employee contributions may go up from 2014. The government has also announced a 1% pay limit for public sector workers in 2014, so even a slight increase in pay could be swallowed by increased pension contributions.

The agreement also introduces career-average instead of final-salary pensions. The accrual and revaluation rates have not yet been set.

The FBU view

The FBU has confirmed its opposition to the LGPS "heads of agreement" document. General secretary Matt Wrack said: "The FBU voiced our concern that the proposal to introduce an increased normal pension age in 2014 did not take

CONTROL STAFF OPPOSE THE DEAL

"Like others in my early fifties, my retirement age changed from 60 to 66 and is now likely to change again. On top of that, the proposals for career-average benefits will see my pension reduced considerably. Increased contributions will affect my living standards with no extra benefits at the end of it. It makes me very angry."

Sharon Thorndyke, Norfolk

"Having worked out what these proposals mean to me in terms of 'money-out-of-my-wage-packet', it is a very real concern that I won't be able to afford to continue to pay into this pension if these proposals go ahead. My biggest concern, though, is that if I do manage to stay in the LGPS but others don't, who is going to be picking up the lost contributions? Will the remaining scheme members be forced into paying even more to keep it viable?"

Sasha Farley, West Midlands

account of the operational elements of the role of a fire control operator and that this was unacceptable to our members."

The union does not accept the planned increased normal pension age. In addition, the FBU pointed out that the protection for low-paid workers proposed in the "heads of agreement" would not apply to any fire control member.

On 10 January, the FBU's control staff national committee (CSNC) met to discuss the government's proposals. The

CSNC endorsed the union's position to oppose the agreement. (Unite has also since rejected the deal.)

Wrack said: "The FBU has also proposed that fire control members have the option to join a fire service pension scheme. The FBU maintains that it is a fundamental requirement that an occupational pension scheme reflects the occupation it relates to in all aspects. The FBU has already discussed this option with government ministers and civil servants and has been examining the financial implications with actuaries."

Retire at 60? **Wh**

If firefighters fail to meet the minimum standard they could be withdrawn from operational duties



IAN MARLOW

y you'll struggle

By the time they are 60 three out of four firefighters could fail a test used by most fire services to measure cardio-respiratory fitness, according to a report commissioned by the FBU.

The report also warns that six out of ten firefighters could fail the test by the time they are 55 – the current normal retirement age for those in the Firefighters' Pension Scheme.

The report, based on the available research, takes data from an American study of the change in aerobic fitness with age. It says: "These figures should not be relied on to provide categorical values. Nevertheless, in the absence of any recent UK data, they serve to indicate the potential proportion of serving firefighters who, according to these criteria, would either fail to meet the proposed national standard or, importantly, fail to meet the minimum level below which they should be withdrawn from operational duties."

The report *Fitness for Work: Estimate of the deterioration of the aerobic fitness of firefighters with age* was written by Dr Richard Graveling of the Institute of Medicine (IOM) and draws on UK and international research. It forms part of the union's evidence opposing an increase in the pension age to 60 for all firefighters.

The evidence is also being used to challenge the retirement age currently in place for those in the New Firefighters' Pension Scheme, which already has a retirement age of 60. If firefighters fail to meet the minimum standard required by the test they could face being withdrawn from operational duties.

A previous report by Dr Graveling and Joanne Crawford highlighted how the natural process of ageing could also impact on the ability of firefighters to perform operational duties. The result, the FBU has pointed out, could be greater numbers of firefighters either taking early retirement on medical grounds, wiping out any savings to the pension scheme from raising the retirement age.

"There is no evidence that firefighters can keep working to 60," said national officer Sean Starbuck. "Those who can't secure a medical retirement could face being sacked on capability grounds as there are rapidly dwindling opportunities for redeployment."

"It's a triple blow for firefighters – pay more, work longer and risk dismissal on grounds of capability at the end that robs you of part of your pension."

"Government and Hutton (author of a report on public sector pensions) picked the age of 60 without any evidence that it was feasible to work as a firefighter to that age."

The capacity to do physical work deteriorates with age, including the general capability to perform physical work (cardio-respiratory fitness). In technical terms this is measured by aerobic capacity

(usually as a volume of oxygen per minute, standardised to body weight – $\text{ml kg}^{-1} \text{min}^{-1}$).

The standard to which most fire services are working is $42 \text{ ml kg}^{-1} \text{min}^{-1}$. Firefighters would be withdrawn from operational duties if their aerobic capacity fell below $35 \text{ ml kg}^{-1} \text{min}^{-1}$.

Being more likely to fail the aerobic capacity test is not the same as ill-health. "This is about what happens to the body as you age, that is not ill-health, it is growing older" said Sean Starbuck. "Age related deterioration is not ill-health, it's part of the natural ageing process and that raises the real risk of being sacked on capability grounds which will hit your eventual pension."

"It gets tougher to undertake live fire entries using BA. It gets more difficult to work in hot and hostile conditions as you get older."

"Tasks which took you four minutes might take you six minutes and your reaction time gets worse. Muscle strength deteriorates, you're less flexible, you have less dexterity, your hips, knees and spine creak a bit more."

"This is all difficult enough to deal with until you reach 55. To demand another five years working

'The mass of evidence we've looked at needs to be considered, up to now it seems it has been ignored'

until you are 60 or beyond does not add up at all, by that age we're not ill, we're just older."

The position on raising the retirement age has been flagged up for some time by the FBU. FBU general secretary Matt Wrack says raising the retirement age for firefighters is wrong.

"Fitness declines with age. If you raise the normal pension age to 60 then more and more firefighters are likely to face dismissal under capability procedures."

"Under the pensions proposals everyone is being asked to pay more, work longer and get less. At the end of your career you are now looking at being robbed of another part of your pension."

"Their proposition is – work longer, pay more, get less. And then they'll rob you of some more if you can't meet the fitness criteria."

"The FBU cannot sign up to a scheme which we all know will not deliver for firefighters or the public. The mass of evidence we've looked at needs to be considered, up to now it seems it has been ignored."

Safety at work

Remember the dead – fight for the living

Workplaces with union safety reps have half the serious injuries of others

Trade unionists throughout the world remember the dead and fight for the living on Workers' Memorial Day (28 April). Never has this message been more important than now, when the government is attacking health and safety at work. The FBU wants all members to take part in campaigning on 28 April this year. Here's why.

How safe is work?

The government says work is good for you. For many people it certainly is not. If it is not organised properly or the risks are not managed, it can kill, injure or give you an illness that may affect the rest of your life.

The number of workers who were killed in Britain's workplaces last year was 171.

However according to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), every year over 8,000 people die of cancers that are caused by their work and another 4,000 die from lung disease. In addition 800 people are killed on the roads while working. If you add the 7–8,000 deaths from heart or circulatory problems caused by work, then the figure is already well over 20,000.

But it is not only deaths. Last year a staggering 1.9 million people were suffering from an illness that was caused or made worse by their work. These deaths and injuries would have been avoidable if employers had taken proper precautions.

Not the 'safest place'

The government has claimed that "Britain is

the safest place to work".

This is nonsense. Although it comes out near the top of the league when looking only at immediate fatalities, this is because Britain has far less manufacturing and heavy engineering than most comparable countries. If you compare deaths caused by work or ill-health, then Britain comes well down the list.

The government is obsessed with removing regulations, rather than trying to ensure that regulation is effective. In its first year it set up three separate reviews of the "burden of health and safety regulation" on business and is planning

to get rid of as many laws as it can.

Last year the government instructed the HSE not to make any further proactive inspections in all but the most hazardous industries. The decision means that many industries, including light engineering, electrical engineering, docks, transport, electricity generation, health care, postal services, retail and quarries, will only see an inspector AFTER something has gone wrong.

The government is trying to cut compensation for injuries at work by changing the way that the claims are dealt with.

This will mean that workers

will have to pay some of the legal costs out of their damages even when they win.

Union workplaces safer

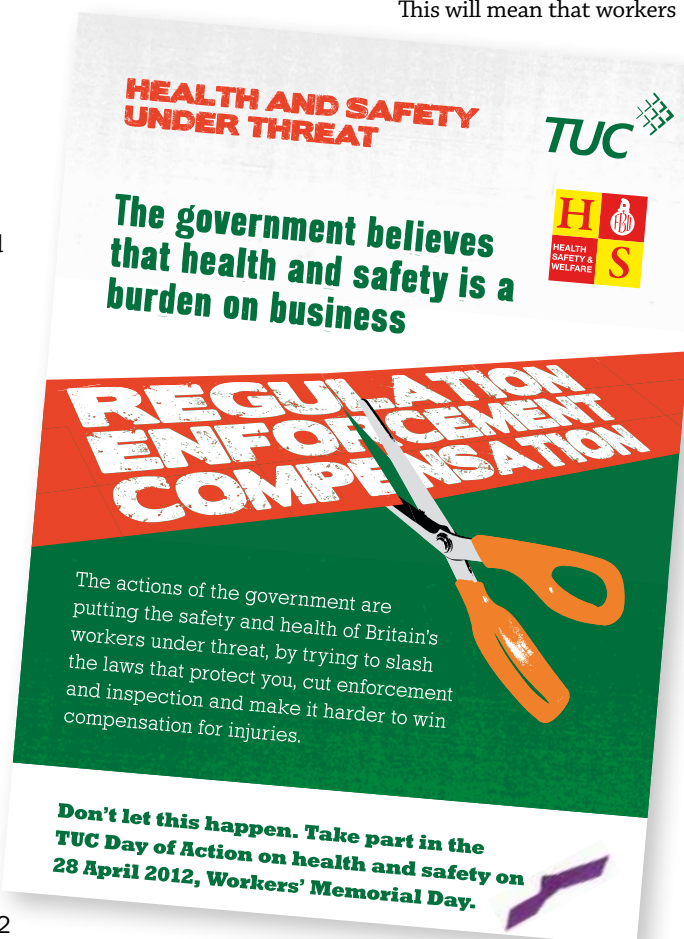
Safety representatives make a huge difference. Workplaces that have trade union safety representatives and safety committees have half the serious injuries of those without.

In January 2007 the government published a report that said safety representatives save society between £181m and £578m each year as a result of lost time reduction from occupational injuries and work-related illnesses. Yet the government is trying to cut down on the amount of time that trade union representatives can spend doing their job.

What you can do

- Find out what is happening in your area on 28 April. Your local FBU safety rep should know about local activities;
- Get some firefighters together and organise, for example, an event, discussion or activity;
- Write to your MP or local paper telling them why the government's attack on work safety is wrong;
- If you are working on 28 April, then organise a minute's silence at noon to remember those who have died because of their work.

More information:
The new FBU/TUC booklet is available on the FBU website: www.fbu.org.uk/?page_id=5020



Legal Beagle

Trouble from over the garden wall



Q I am having a battle with my neighbours. They want me to cut down a tree that they say is reducing the sunlight into their garden and to raise the fence between us to give them more privacy. Where do I stand legally in getting them to back off?

A The only way your neighbours can make you remove the tree is to prove that they have right to "ancient light" and that you are denying them this. To do this they would need to prove that they have had uninterrupted use of that light for longer than 20 years and that the tree in question blocks the light from the windows of the property.

However, your neighbour's complaint concerns the right to light in a garden and that is not included in the definition of right to ancient light.

If the boundary fencing belongs to you then they cannot insist that it is altered. It would be prudent to find out the ownership of the boundary from your deeds.

Q My wife was injured in a car crash that was not her fault. She has been advised by the other driver's insurer to accept £1,000 compensation. She is still in pain and having treatment several months after it happened. Should she accept the money?

A It is likely that your wife's injury is "worth" considerably more than £1,000. She



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

would need to get expert medical opinion to know for sure. No one injured in an accident that was not their fault should accept an insurance company offer without getting independent legal advice. She can do this through the FBU's extended legal service that covers family members injured in non-work-related accidents.

Insurance companies make these offers to save money. They routinely call injured people with offers which may sound good, but they cannot

make an honest assessment of the impact of your wife's injury, how long it will take for her to recover and what her losses will be without investigation.

No one is under an obligation to accept an insurance company offer, no matter how persistent the insurer is or what they may claim about it being a better deal than a lawyer would be able to achieve.

Independent legal advice may result in your wife receiving many times more

compensation than the insurance company offer.

Q Can an employer discipline or dismiss an employee for capability reasons while they are off sick?

A It is a common myth that workers cannot be sacked while they are off sick. Being off sick is no protection against being disciplined or dismissed for another reason.

One of the five fair reasons the Employment Relations Act sets out for dismissing an employee is on grounds of capability. Unscrupulous employers often rely on this ground when trying to avoid paying redundancy payments, claiming that an employee has been dismissed because of poor performance or due to long-term sickness absence.

So employees who are signed off as unfit for work and face disciplinary action will not protect themselves by not attending a disciplinary hearing in the hope that the employer will not dismiss them. Instead, they will leave themselves vulnerable to being dismissed on grounds of capability.

Whether or not the employee would succeed in a claim for unfair dismissal if this happens is dependent on being able to show that the employer acted unreasonably in all the circumstances, ie they did not act in the way that any reasonable employer would.

'It's more a way of life'

Ashley Martineaux is a top Brazilian jiu jitsu fighter

Brazilian jiu jitsu

There's certainly nothing lightweight about Epsom firefighter Ashley Martineaux, who is heading off to Abu Dhabi in April to compete in the Brazilian Jiu Jitsu World Pro championships.

Ashley, who competes as a heavyweight, has already won medals for his jiu jitsu prowess. The white watch member won a bronze in the Brazilian Jiu Jitsu English Open last year. But this was not the peak of his performance to date. In fact, it was the first time Ashley had been beaten in a formal contest.

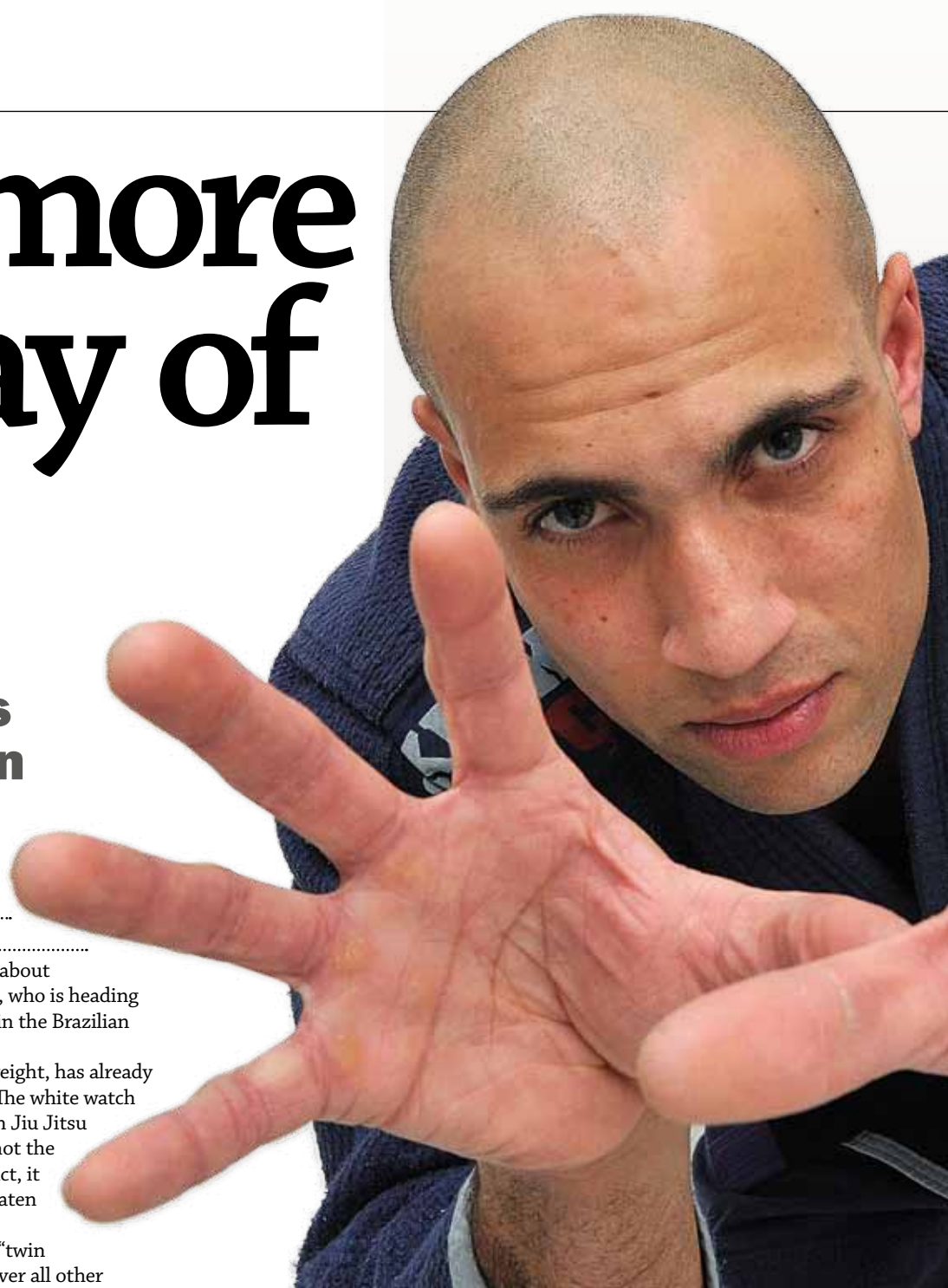
In the 2010 English Open he won "twin golds": a gold medal for triumphing over all other heavyweight contenders and "Absolute Gold" for going on to beat winners from every other weight category. This man is clearly no pushover.

As *Firefighter* went to press, Ashley, 28, was preparing for the Abu Dhabi Pro Trials in Birmingham – other trials are being held in America, Canada and other European cities in the run-up to the Abu Dhabi championships.

If Ashley wins a gold medal in Birmingham, sponsors will bankroll his airfare to Abu Dhabi; all winners have their fares paid. But he is so keen on competing in this increasingly popular form of mixed martial arts that he is prepared to pay his own way. Oh yes, and he has got his sights set on the world championship.

Brazilian jiu jitsu is certainly not for slackers. Ashley trains five days a week and even twice a day sometimes – as firefighting shifts allow. "You need a lot of body conditioning and training to perfect techniques," says Ashley, who trains near his home in Gravesend at the Valmyr Neto Team gym.

And it's not just any old gym. Valmyr Neto is a



ASHLEY MARTINEAUX

Epsom, Surrey, firefighter Ashley Martineaux, who trains five days a week, and sometimes twice a day when the opportunity arises, plans to do well in the world Brazilian jiu jitsu championships in Abu Dhabi



Competitive rounds last a punishing seven minutes – with contestants constantly moving around and fighting for position



PICTURES: MIKE BARTLETT

Brazilian jiu jitsu black-belt and featherweight multi-champion. Jiu jitsu practitioners tend to do rather well in mixed martial arts contests – and the discipline is highly regarded by ultimate fighting championship fans. Not surprisingly, the gym attracts many mixed martial arts enthusiasts.

Ashley hasn't been tempted by other varieties of MMA, or to "cross train" in other disciplines. "I'm quite a purist which means I'm focused on my Brazilian jiu jitsu," he says.

So what is the unique jiu jitsu appeal? "It's not just about competing, it's more a way of life," Ashley says. "It keeps you quite level headed, humble and well disciplined. And it's not about ego." There is, he says, a saying which sums up how the people should prepare themselves before competing or entering the gym for a jiu jitsu training or sparring session: "You leave your shoes and your egos at the door."

There are techniques and holds to be learned, including various locks and submission tactics. Chokes can look rather scary to the outsider, but form an integral part of jiu jitsu practice.

Ashley says his colleagues at Epsom fire station are quite supportive and there is a bit of watch banter about his particular chosen sport. "My colleagues have a bit of a laugh saying when I'm not at the fire station I'm at 'cuddle club'. So I usually give them a big 'cuddle' and choke them. Or pretend to, obviously." They haven't been to see Ashley in action competing as yet, but they would be more than welcome.

Ashley first got interested in jiu jitsu nearly seven years ago, after taking up Thai boxing a year after he joined the fire service. He hasn't looked back.

"I really enjoy testing my skills against other competitors or even against training partners at the gym. You've got to put the time and effort in, it's hard work but well worth it."

"It usually takes ten years to make a black belt – twice as long as judo. I'm a purple belt at the moment and have two steps to go. You move onto

the next stage when your assessor says it's time to progress and formally awards you a belt promotion."

At Ashley's level, competitive rounds last a punishing seven minutes – with contestants "constantly moving around and fighting for position". Kimonos are worn. Calories are burned off.

Diet is important. Ashley eats plenty of fish and white meat to help build muscle mass, but tends to stay away from red meat. He's a big fan of super-foods which, along-side the rigorous work-out regime, help keep him super fit. Acai berries are a particular favourite.

He also has to watch his weight – shedding pounds. "I usually sit at 96 kilos and have to drop down to 92 to avoid the heavier categories. I will cut down to 92 for Abu Dhabi because there is no weight limit above 92 kilos. If I don't cut weight, I could find myself fighting people of up to 120 kilos."

But whatever the contest chucks at him, Ashley's response should be anything but lightweight, given his fighting form to date.

Prize quiz

WIN!

Win an olive tree

To win an olive tree please send your answers by 31 March 2012 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (March 2012), FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE. Please include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.

1 In what year were the first Nobel Prizes awarded?

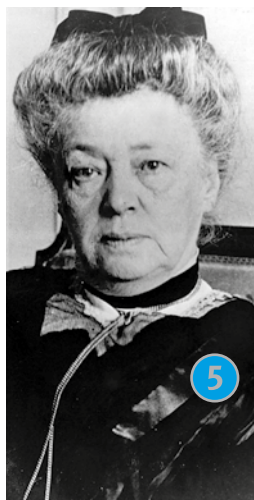
- A – 1901
B – 1911
C – 1921
D – 1961

2 Doris Lessing, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2007, was born to English parents in which country?

- A – Iraq
B – Iran
C – Lebanon
D – England

3 The author of An Indian Woman in Guatemala, Rigoberta Menchu Tum, won the Nobel Peace Prize in what year?

- A – 1991
B – 1999
C – 2002
D – 1992



AP/PA PHOTOS

4 In 2011 three women shared the Nobel Peace Prize. Who amongst the following is not one of them?

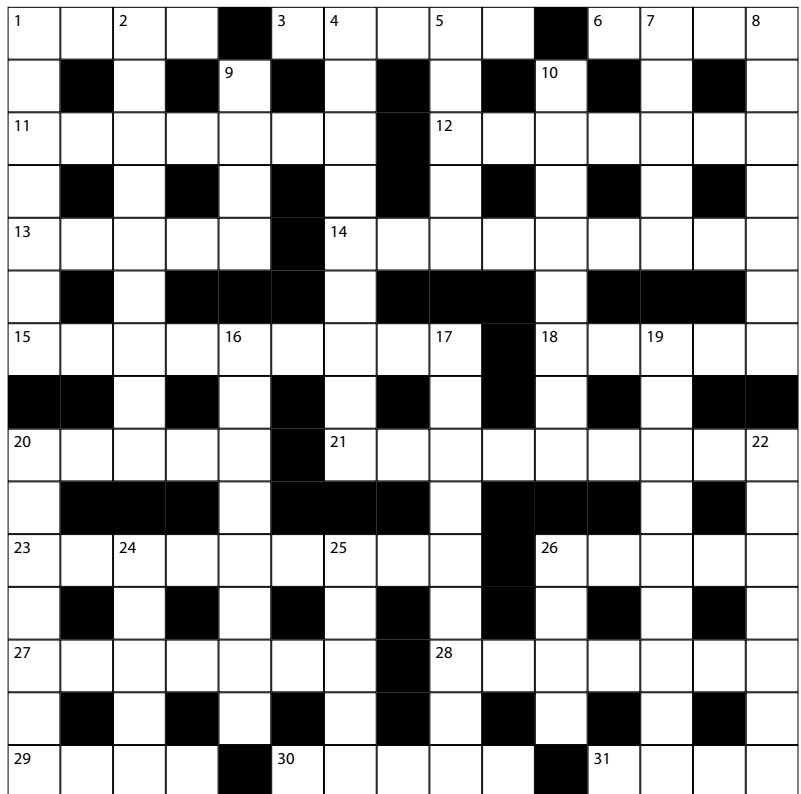
- A – Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
B – Hillary Clinton
C – Leymah Gbowee
D – Tawakkol Karman

5 Which of the following was not under arrest at the time of being awarded a Nobel Peace Prize?

- A – Aang San Suu Kyi
B – Carl von Ossietzky
C – Baroness Bertha von Suttner
D – Liu Xiaobo



AP/PA PHOTOS



CROSSWORD

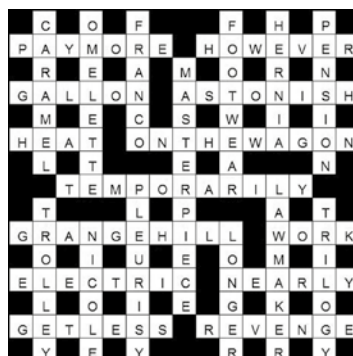
ACROSS

- 1** Essential bit of kit for dousing fire (4)
3 Game played on 8x8 squared board with 'armies' of 16 pieces (5)
6 Relatively small water-borne conveyance (4)
11 Hindu, Buddhist etc concept of release from suffering – or band of the late Kurt Cobain (7)
12 Cabinet minister, resigned over relationship with the 'advisor' who wasn't (4,3)
13 The Beatle who beat time (5)
14 Branch officer with the purse-strings (9)
15 Very, very tasty (9)
18 Villas-Boas; Agassi (or Peter) (5)
20, 25 dn Cabinet minister resigned in February when charged over speeding points (5, 5)
21 Cabinet minister, resigned over expenses irregularity (5,4)
23 Russian city on the Volga, or the lamb's fur named after it (9)
26 Danger (5)
27 Big cat – fastest animal on earth (7)
28 Make or become better (7)
29 Wind 1 across (or fishing line) onto this (4)
30 Raising or brewing agent (5)
31 Speedy (4)

DOWN

- 1** Ton; century (7)
2 Life-saving equipment that senses and douses fire (9)
4 Decay-resistant core of a tree (9)
5 Find answer, to puzzle, crime etc (5)
7 Propose; put forward for consideration; sales promotion (5)
8 Without duty (3-4)
9 Algarve city and airport (4)
10 Place to put headgear (other than your head) (3-5)
16 Emergency hospital department, or one taken there (8)
17 Decade of oil crisis, end of Vietnam war, The Godfather and Dark Side of the Moon (9)
19 The runs, commonly (9)
20 Geoffrey, author of Canterbury Tales (7)
22 A substance in which another will dissolve; financially secure (7)
24 Not here? Must be over ... (5)
25 See 20 across
26 Cylinder for conveying liquid or gas, or for smoking tobacco (4)

Last month's answers and winners



Crossword solution January/February

January/February quiz answers

- 1.** A – Abraham Lincoln
2. C – Karl Marx
3. C – William Shakespeare
4. B – Fidel Castro
5. D – Mark Twain

Winner of the November/December quiz
Helen Dickinson, Devon

Station Cat

A textbook failure – no-one is to blame

*Sadiq Khan
MP thought
FiReControl
was making
good progress*




A lesson for us all

 Strange are the ways of government. One set of ministers spent nine years telling us that FiReControl was wonderful. Now another set of ministers are using FiReControl as a textbook example of how not to do things. A new academy, providing very expensive training from Oxford's prestigious Said Business School, is to train senior civil servants on how to handle major projects – by unpicking the FiReControl fiasco.

Your Cat ought to be pleased about this. FiReControl may have wasted at least £500m and left the taxpayer paying expensive upkeep on new buildings for which we have no use; but at least lessons have been learned. The trouble is, they haven't. The lesson of this one is: listen to the professionals who do the job – in this case, men and women who fight fires. But that's not the sort of lesson they teach at Said Business School.

What's in a name?

 The Cat thinks this one was doomed from the moment they thought up the name – FiReControl, with its pointless mixture of capitals and lower case letters. Someone did once explain to your Cat why the R and the C are in capitals, but she was preoccupied with something more interesting, like watching paint dry. PR companies are paid millions of pounds to come up with idiot things

like that. But the Cat suspects that Said Business School will not warn people against spending our money on branding. Business schools love branding.

Blame game


 If you want to know what happened, ask Sadiq Khan. He was one of several New Labour fire ministers who told us what a wonderful thing this huge and bottomless money pit was going to be. The New Labour government decided it would be a good idea to abolish the 46 local fire and rescue centres across England and set up nine regional control centres in their place. The wretched Mr Khan's defence can still be heard on YouTube, if you can bear it. "The FiReControl project has made good progress and there's been a number of improvements on a number of fronts." Now his colleague Margaret Hodge, chair of the House of Commons public accounts committee, says: "The taxpayer has lost nearly half a billion pounds and eight of the completed regional control centres remain as empty and costly white elephants. No one has been held to account for this project failure, one of the worst we have seen for many years, and the careers of most of the



If you can't beat them ... Lord Prescott tries a police bike for size

senior staff responsible have carried on as if nothing had gone wrong at all and the consultants and contractor continue to work on many other government projects." So have the careers of the politicians, she might have added (but, naturally, didn't), John Prescott and loyal lieutenants like Sadiq Khan.


Just the ticket

 The Cat shares Ms Hodge's pain. It is indeed shocking that the careers of those responsible for this fiasco have not suffered. In fact, your Cat can exclusively reveal that one

of them is lining himself up for a hugely responsible job directly controlling a large and important part of the police service.

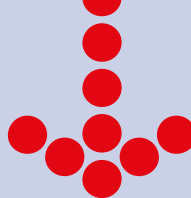
To whom can your Cat be referring? A clue may help. He has some acquaintance with the workings of the police service. On several occasions the constabulary have had cause to apprehend him as he drove round the country at terrifying speed, probably in one or other of his two Jags (that's a clue). He's been fined for speeding four times, and in 1991 was banned from driving for 21 days after police clocked his speed at 105 mph on the M1. On the M62, he was caught for driving at 80mph in icy conditions in which the police recommended a maximum of 30mph. That was in 1997 – after which, for ten years, he was saved from further embarrassment by being chauffeured in a ministerial limousine.

Blame the help

 Still not there? Does this help? He gave an incoherent account of the FiReControl fiasco to the Radio 4 *Today* programme in which he blamed his civil servants. He was – oh, what the hell, he used to be called John Prescott, and he's now called Lord Prescott. Also, he used to be called a buffoon, and being 73, he's now called a loveable buffoon. And he wants to be police commissioner in Humberside, which reminds us that he also used to be known as "the mouth of the Humber." If the Cat lived in Humberside, she'd be very, very afraid.



25-year badges



Roger Sarginson (l), Dorset, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Karen Adams



Rick Howes (r), white watch, Torquay, receives his 25-year badge from brigade membership secretary Andy Gould



Dai Jones (l), Dorset, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Karen Adams



Mike Cox (l), Dorset, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Karen Adams



Will Creighton (l), Dorset, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Karen Adams



Fran Jackson (l), Dorset, receives her 25-year badge from brigade secretary Karen Adams



Keith Tuckerman (r), green watch, Paignton, receives his 25-year badge from brigade membership secretary Andy Gould



Jock Massie (l), South Devon area trainer, Devon and Somerset, receives his 25-year badge from membership secretary Andy Gould



Robbie Pattern (c), Bank Hall station, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Les Skarratts (l), and vice chair Kev Hughes



Kevn Croft (r), red watch, Peterlee, Durham, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Steve McLaughlan



John Blyth (r), green watch, Bradford, West Yorkshire, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Andy Pickering



Steve Johnson (l), white watch, Skelmersdale, Lancashire, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Kev Wilkie



Michael Unwin (r), red watch, Peterlee, Durham, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Steve McLaughlan



Kenny Atkins (l), blue watch, Bradford, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Steve Butterfield (back row l-r), Phil Warden, Mark Needham, Adam Turner, John Mellor, Jarrod Stoney, Dave Rourke, Paul Bradbury, Ahsan Ali, Bryan Wilkins and Eddie Ball

FBU regional offices

REGION 1 Scotland

52 St Enoch Square, Glasgow,
Scotland G1 4AA
0141 221 2309, 01rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 2 Northern Ireland

14 Bachelors Walk, Lisburn,
Co Antrim, BT28 1XJ
02892 664622, 02rs@fbu.org

REGION 3 Cleveland, Durham, Northumberland, Tyne & Wear

1 Carlton Court, 5th Avenue, Team Valley,
Gateshead, NE11 0AZ
0191 487 4142, 03rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 4 Yorks and Humberside

9 Marsh Street, Rothwell,
Leeds, LS26 0AG
0113 288 7000, 04rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 5 Greater Manchester, Lancs, Isle of Man, Cumbria, Merseyside, Cheshire

The Lighthouse, Lower Mersey St,
Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, CH65 2AL
0151 357 4400, 05rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 6 Derbys, Notts, Lincs, Leics, Northants

Little Dennis Street South (above
Dawsons), Nottingham NG2 4EU
0115 947 2042, 06gen@fbu.org.uk

REGION 7 West Mids, Staffs, Warks, Hereford & Worcester, Salop

195/7 Halesowen Rd, Old Hill,
West Midlands, B64 6HE
01384 413633, 07rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 8 Mid and West Wales, North Wales, South Wales

4 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, Pencoed,
Bridgend, CF35 5LJ
01656 867910, 08rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 9 Herts, Beds, Cambs, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk

28 Atlantic Square, Station Road,
Witham, Essex, CM8 2TL
01376 521521, 09rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 10 London

John Horner Mews, Frome Street,
Islington, London, N1 8PB
020 7359 3638, london@fbu.org.uk

REGION 11 Kent, Surrey, Sussex

Unit 11, Hunns Mere Way,
Woodingdean, Brighton, BN2 6AH
01273 309762, 11rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 12 Bucks, Berks, Hants, Oxon, Isle of Wight

FBU Regional Office, The Merlin
Centre, Unit L, Gatehouse Close,
Aylesbury HP19 8DP
01296 482297, 12rs@fbu.org.uk

REGION 13 Cornwall, Devon and Somerset, Avon, Gloucs, Wilts, Dorset

158 Muller Road, Horfield,
Bristol, BS7 9RE
0117 935 5132, 13rs@fbu.org.uk

Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Organiser of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE 0808 100 6061

The line provides advice for personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.